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IN THE CLAIMS

The status of claims in this application is as follows:

1. (*Currently Amended*) An image search apparatus, which searches image data according to keywords assigned~~stored in relation~~ to said image data, said image search apparatus comprising:
- input means for inputting a search terms~~query~~;
- search means for searching for ~~keywords corresponding to images to be searched~~said image data according to the search terms~~query~~ inputted by said input means and the keywords stored in relation to said image data; and
- acquiring means for acquiring importance of the keywords, the importance being stored in relation to the keywords stored in relation to said image data searched by said search means; and
- rearranging~~output~~ means for ~~rearranging images corresponding to the keywords~~outputting the image data searched by said search means in an order according to said importance of the keywords in relation to the content of the images being searched~~acquired by said acquiring means~~.
2. (*Currently Amended*) An image search apparatus according to claim 1, wherein ~~when said rearranging~~output means ~~rearranges~~outputs the ~~images corresponding to the keywords searched by said search means~~image data according to said importance, said rearranging means regards standard importance of a default or ~~said importance as priority, degree of said importance being determined according to whether or not the searched keywords represent subjects of images~~when said importance is not stored in relation to the keywords.
3. (*Currently Amended*) An image search apparatus, which searches image data according to keywords assigned~~stored in relation~~ to said image data, said image search apparatus comprising:
- storage means storing the keywords stored in relation to said image data, synonyms of said keywords, and accordance between said keywords and said synonyms;
- input means for inputting a search terms~~query~~;

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search means for searching for ~~keywords corresponding to images to be searched or keywords closely related in meaning to said images to be searched~~ said image data according to the search ~~terms~~ query inputted by said input means, the keywords stored in relation to said image data, and the synonyms stored by said storage means; and

first acquiring means for acquiring importance of the keywords, the importance being stored in relation to the keywords stored in relation to said image data searched by said search means;

second acquiring means for acquiring said accordance when said search means has searched said image data according to said synonyms; and

rearrangingoutput means for rearranging images corresponding to the keywords searched by said search means outputting the image data searched by said search means in an order according to said importance of the keywords in relation to the content of the images being searched acquired by said first acquiring means and closeness in meaning of said closely related keywords said accordance acquired by said second acquiring means.

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4-5. (Canceled)

6. (Currently Amended) An image search apparatus according to any of claims 1 through 53, wherein said image search apparatus is provided in a server of an information retrieval system on the Internet, said input means receiving a search terms query inputted by from a WWW browser of a client of said information retrieval system on the Internet, said search means searching for keywords corresponding to images to be searched according to the received search terms, said rearrangingoutput means rearranging images corresponding to keywords outputting the image data searched by said search means according to said importance, and said image search apparatus returning the rearranged images in a predetermined format, which includes such as HTML and XML, to said client in said order.

7. (Currently Amended) An image search method applied to an image search apparatus, which

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searches image data according to keywords ~~assigned~~stored in relation to said image data, said image search method comprising:

an input step of inputting a search termsquery;

a searching step of searching for ~~keywords corresponding to images to be searched~~said image data according to the search ~~termsquery~~inputted by said input steps and the keywords stored in relation to said image data; and

an acquiring step of acquiring importance of the keywords, the importance being stored in relation to the keywords stored in relation to said image data searched by said searching step; and

an output-rearranging step of rearranging images corresponding to the keywordsoutputting the image data searched by said searching step in an order according to said importance of the keywords in relation to the content of the images being searchedacquired by said acquiring step.

BI 8. (Currently amended) An image search method according to claim 7, wherein ~~when the images corresponding to the keywords~~image data searched by said search means are ~~rearranged~~output according to said importance, said rearranging step comprises ~~regarding standard importance of a default or said importance as priority, degree of said importance being determined according to whether or not the searched keywords represent subjects of images~~when said importance is not stored in relation to the keywords.

9. (Currently Amended) An image search method applied to an image search apparatus, which searches image data according to keywords ~~assigned~~stored in relation to said image data, said image search method comprising:

a storage controlling step of storing, in storage means, the keywords stored in relation to said image data, synonyms of said keywords, and accordance between said keywords and said synonyms;

an input step of inputting a search termsquery;

a searching step of searching for ~~keywords corresponding to said images to be searched or~~

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~~keywords closely related in meaning to said images to be searched~~said image data according to the search ~~terms~~query inputted by said input step, the keywords stored in relation to said image data, and the synonyms stored by said storage controlling step;~~and~~

a first acquiring step of acquiring importance of the keywords, the importance being stored in relation to the keywords stored in relation to said image data searched by said searching step;

a second acquiring step of acquiring said accordance when said image data have been searched according to said synonyms by said searching step;~~and~~

an output rearranging step of rearranging images corresponding to the keywords searched by said searching step~~outputting the image data searched by said searching step in an order according to said importance of the keywords in relation to the content of the images being searched~~acquired by said first acquiring step and closeness in meaning of said closely related keywords~~said accordance acquired by said second acquiring step.~~

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10-11. (Canceled)

12. (Currently Amended) An image search method according to any of claims 7 through 11, wherein said input step comprises receiving a search terms~~query~~ inputted ~~by~~from a WWW browser of a client of an information retrieval system on the Internet, ~~said searching step comprising searching for keywords corresponding to images to be searched according to the received search terms,~~ said rearranging~~output~~ step comprising rearranging images corresponding to keywords~~outputting the image data searched by said searching step according to said importance,~~ and the rearranged images being returned in a predetermined format, which includes such as HTML and XML, to said client in said order.

13. (Currently Amended) A storage medium that can be read by a computer and stores a program for executing an image search applied to an image search apparatus, which searches image data according to keywords assigned~~stored in relation~~ to said image data, said storage medium

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comprising instructions for:

inputting a search termsquery;

searching for ~~keywords corresponding to images to be searched~~said image data according to the search termsquery inputted by said input stepinstruction and the keywords stored in relation to said image data; and

acquiring importance of the keywords, the importance being stored in relation to the keywords stored in relation to said image data searched by said searching instruction; and

rearranging images corresponding to the keywords~~outputting the image data~~ searched by said searching stepinstruction in an order according to said importance of the keywords in relation to the content of the images being searchedacquired by said acquiring instruction.

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14. (Currently amended) A storage medium according to claim 13, wherein ~~when the images corresponding to the keywords~~image data searched ~~are rearranged~~output according to said importance, ~~said rearranging instruction comprises regarding standard importance of a default or said importance as priority, degree of said importance being determined according to whether or not the searched keywords represent subjects of images~~when said importance is not stored in relation to the keywords.

15. (Currently Amended) A storage medium that can be read by a computer and stores a program for executing an image search applied to an image search apparatus, which searches image data according to keywords ~~assigned~~stored in relation to said image data, said storage medium comprising instructions for:

storing the keywords stored in relation to said image data, synonyms of said keywords, and accordance between said keywords and said synonyms;

inputting a search termsquery;

searching for ~~keywords corresponding to images to be searched or keywords closely related in meaning to said images to be searched~~said image data according to the search termsquery inputted by said input stepinstruction, the keywords stored in relation to said image

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data, and the synonyms stored by said storing instruction; and

acquiring importance of the keywords, the importance being stored in relation to the keywords stored in relation to said image data searched by said searching instruction;

acquiring said accordance when said image data have been searched according to said synonyms by said searching instruction; and

rearranging images corresponding to the keywords outputting the image data searched by said searching step instruction in an order according to said importance of the keywords in relation to the content of the images being searched and closeness in meaning of said closely related keywords said accordance.

16-17. (Canceled)

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18. (Currently amended) A storage medium according to any of claims 13 through ~~17~~15, wherein said input instruction comprises receiving a search terms query inputted by from a WWW browser of a client of an information retrieval system on the Internet, said searching instruction comprising searching for keywords corresponding to images to be searched according to the received search terms, said rearranging output instruction comprising rearranging images corresponding to keywords outputting the image data searched by said searching instruction according to said importance, and the rearranged images being returned in a predetermined format, which includes such as HTML and XML, to said client in said order.